

Attachment M - Additional Federal Activities

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Farm Bill Activities

Mr. Christensen's focus was developments in the Farm Bill. In past Farm Bills, significant initiatives related to land conservation measures have been built in. In 1996 the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was introduced.

Both the House and Senate versions of the current (2002) Farm Bill have conservation incentives and request increased funding. The House version has already been passed, and both versions have components that strengthen conservation.

Percentages of funds expended in the Mississippi River Basin for conservation initiatives are as follows:

- 77% of total EQIP funds
- 75% of the Conservation Reserve Program total funds
- 89% of the Wetland Reserve Program total funds
- 69% of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program total funds

Although the Farm Bill is significant an increase in the technical and financial assistance provided to agriculture-based conservation initiatives, by state and local programs should not be overlooked.

In September 2001 the Secretary of Agriculture released the "Food and Agricultural Policy" document. It refers to a "portfolio approach to conservation", that involves carefully designing and using existing tools most appropriately for land retirement, stewardship, conservation, compliance, and regulatory assistance.

The House version (H.R. 2646) of the Farm Bill passed last fall calls for the following:

- Increases enrollment for CREP (36.4 to 40 million acres)
- EQIP (increases payment limits up to four times, increases authorization of funds up to \$1.2 billion from \$200 million)
- WRP (increases annual enrollment by 150,000 acres)
- WHIP (sets funding level at \$25 million per year; established Grassland Reserve Program and Farmland Stewardship Program to achieve conservation objectives)

The Senate version conforms more or less with the House version as described. The Senate Farm Bill offers many amendments, which will soon be voted on. The Dorgan-Grassly amendment (which was passed), for example, reduces annual farm subsidy payments from \$500,000 to \$275,000. Once the Farm Bill is signed by the President, USDA will go to implementation. The Secretary of Agriculture wants to "hit the ground running" when the Farm Bill is passed, by preparing some advance work.

Dale Bucks noted that additional authorities are earmarked in the Farm Bill Conservation title, under Conservation Programs, for education, outreach, monitoring, and evaluation. No additional authorities for research are earmarked because they are covered in previous titles. Within the research titles there is strong emphasis on three areas – trade policy, biosecurity, and biotechnology.